

Montgomery County Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association (“MCVFRA”), Tuition Assistance

Important Information

This booklet provides general guidance for active volunteers about tuition assistance benefit. It is not intended to change or otherwise modify any law, rule, regulation or bargaining agreement that may impact the subject matter contained in this document. If there is an inconsistency, the law, rule, regulation or bargaining agreement will prevail.

General Information and Eligibility

Q. What is tuition assistance?

A. Tuition assistance is funding that the County provides to help an active volunteer pay for education or training that the active volunteer chooses to take. Its purpose is to help you improve your performance and career potential.

Q. Who is eligible for tuition assistance?

A. An active volunteer is a local fire and rescue department volunteer who qualified under the point system outlined in the Montgomery County Code, Section 21-21; and whose name appeared on the most recent certified list of active volunteers (a copy of which must be attached to the tuition assistance application); and who is currently functioning as a fire and rescue department volunteer as certified on the tuition assistance application by the president of the applicable local fire and rescue department and the Montgomery County Fire Chief or his/her designee.

Q. What does tuition assistance cover?

A. Tuition assistance covers education or training to obtain a:

- ☐ certificate;
- ☐ associate degree;
- ☐ baccalaureate degree; or
- ☐ graduate degree.

Tuition assistance may also be used for credit courses, non-credit courses, or seminars.

Tuition assistance covers **only** the cost of **tuition**.

Tuition assistance **does not** cover direct or compulsory costs of the training such as:

- ☐ matriculation;
- ☐ registration;
- ☐ laboratory fees; and
- ☐ library services.

Q. To qualify for tuition assistance, does the training or education have to be related to my volunteer activities?

A. The training must be directly related to either:

- ☐ to the active volunteer's current duties as a volunteer or those skills necessary for advancement within the volunteer ranks

Q. What does tuition assistance not cover?

A. Tuition assistance does **not** cover:

- ☐ credit courses taken on an audit (i.e., no grade) basis; or
- ☐ books, supplies, and application or extra fees incidental to the course.

Also, tuition assistance may not be used to duplicate benefits received for the same training or education under other programs.

Q. Where can I take training that is covered by tuition assistance?

A. Courses covered by tuition assistance are offered by a wide variety of organizations such as public or private:

- ❑ vocational or business schools;
- ❑ colleges or universities;
- ❑ professional, scientific, or technical institutes; or
- ❑ organizations or components of organizations that offer courses or training.

Q. How much tuition assistance is available to an active volunteer?

A. Total funding for tuition assistance is set on a fiscal year basis (July 1 – June 30). The maximum amount that an active volunteer may receive *during FY20* is \$1,830.00.

Note: tuition assistance is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Once all the funds for the fiscal year are used, tuition assistance is not available until the next fiscal year.

Q. When can I take courses covered by tuition assistance?

A. Courses covered by tuition assistance must be taken *during off-duty hours*.

Q. Is tuition assistance a taxable benefit?

A. At the present time, tuition assistance is not considered taxable income. However,

it has been taxable in the past and could become taxable again if federal law changes. If tuition assistance becomes taxable, the training staff will notify tuition assistance participants.

How and When to Apply

Q. How do I apply for tuition assistance?

A. To apply, you must:

- ❑ obtain a tuition assistance application form. To do this:
 - ❑ go to the County's web site: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov>
Click on Government and Select employees; Then Human Resources; Career Development respectively or
 - ❑ ask for a copy from the Training staff in person or by calling 240-777-5116.
- ❑ fill out the application form, in duplicate;
- ❑ obtain necessary departmental signatures; and
- ❑ forward the application to the LOSAP Administrator, MCFRS Division of Volunteer Services Office at 100 Edison Park Drive, Gaithersburg, MD. The LOSAP Administrator will verify your eligibility and completeness of your application and will forward it to the OHR Training and Organizational Development Team.

Q. When may I apply for tuition assistance?

A. The training and development staff accepts tuition assistance applications only for the current registration period. Be sure to submit your application *at least two weeks* prior to your actual registration. Don't forget to allow time for getting necessary signatures in your department.

Q. How long does it take to process an application?

A. The training and development staff will make every effort to process your application within seven to ten days of receiving it.

Q. How will I know that my tuition assistance has been approved?

A. Once your application has been approved, you will receive an *authorization letter (contract letter)* from OHR addressed to the school. Take the letter to the school when you register. The letter is a contract that authorizes the school to bill the County directly for tuition fees.

Q. What should I do if I've already paid for the course?

A. You may request to be reimbursed. To request reimbursement, submit a copy of the receipt indicating payment of the tuition to the training and development staff, OHR, 255 Rockville Pike, suite 102.

Your Obligations

Q. What are my responsibilities under the tuition assistance program?

A. You must remain an active volunteer for the County for at least one year after completing any course funded in whole or in part by the County, *or* you must reimburse the County a prorated amount of the tuition assistance received. If you are no longer an active volunteer contact the training and development staff to arrange for repayment of the funds. Otherwise, the amount owed will be sent to our collection unit.

All course work must be completed with a passing grade or documented by a course completion certificate. It is **your** responsibility to submit the original grade notice or copy of course completion certificate to the OHR training and development staff. Future tuition assistance requests from you will not be processed until grade notices or certificates for prior courses have been received by the training and development staff.

Q. What if I don't complete the course or if I fail the course?

A. If you don't successfully complete an approved course, you're obligated to reimburse the County for any funds spent for the course. Future tuition assistance requests will be denied if you do not repay those funds to the County.

Q. What if I am approved for tuition assistance and don't attend the training?

A. If your tuition assistance has been approved by OHR and you decide not to register for the course, it is your responsibility to notify the training staff immediately so that the funds can be made available to another student.

Your notification of tuition assistance approval will ask whether you registered for the approved course and will ask you to respond to the training staff by a specific date. After that date, if you have not used the approved tuition assistance, the training staff will let you know that your funds will be canceled for that semester.

If you need additional information about the County's tuition assistance program, please call the training and development staff at 240-777-5116.

NOTE: This information can be made available in an alternate format. Please contact the training and development staff at (240) 777-5116.